



The Munro Society

Mountain Quality Indicators Newsletter 1 June 2011

Introduction

The MQI Committee, looking to stimulate and maintain interest in the MQI project, has decided to produce a regular newsletter for those who have been or are participating in the project. This will include data on progress, topics of interest arising from MQIs submitted and, hopefully, articles from those contributing to the project. The initial intention is to produce a newsletter at the end of each season. It remains to be seen if such a frequency can be maintained. This first edition also covers historic data from the start of the project. Past President Derek Sime, who together with John Burdin has been a major contributor to the success of the project, has written about how the completion of MQIs has added to the enjoyment of his hill days. Hopefully, some of you will contribute to future editions.

Historic Data

When MQIs are received they are checked and individually referenced using Munro's Tables and then entered on a database. This database comprises a listing of all MQIs received from inception of the project and includes information on date completed, season, who completed and rating given. From the database MQIs are also recorded in the MQI Tracker, which appears on the Website, and in the Newsletter. The following information shows the number of MQIs submitted since inception and by whom. The years quoted are based on the four seasons Spring through to Winter (March to February). It is apt that the first contributor was founding President Irvine Butterfield.

MQI Submitters	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total	Spr. 2011
Butterfield I	1	3	4	4	1					13	
Breaden G		27	6	21						54	
Burdin J		10	10	3	12	4	2	1	2	44	
Grant K		1	2							3	
Jessett J&P		1								1	
Robertson I A		12	11	54	26	5	15		5	128	3

MQI Submitters	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total	Spr. 2011
Ross J		1	2	3						6	
Sime D		10	32	42	56	51	63	47	57	358	15
Allan J			1							1	
Campbell A			6	2	5	3				16	
Hunter E			3		5				1	9	5
Urquhart M			14	1						15	
Ward F			4							4	1
Bunting D				6	7	19	4			36	
Milner A						3	1			4	
Willimott P						1				1	
Brook A							3		14	17	8
Sharpe S							2			2	
Walter C							8	3		11	
Batty D								20	62	82	18
Manson R								2		2	
Murray C								1		1	
Cran D									5	5	
Foot A-M									1	1	1
Butler A											6
Green J									1	1	
Jones M									5	5	
Other		4	2							6	
Total	1	69	97	136	112	86	98	74	153	826	58
Submitters	1	9	13	9	7	7	8	6	10	27	9

Although there has been a steady flow of reports, averaging around 100 per year, the members contributing have remained relatively small averaging around 9 each year. The above table shows the total number received to date. The main challenge facing us is to have an MQI for each mountain for each season by the end of Phase 2 in 2014. That is 1,132 unique MQIs.

The Tracker shows the status for unique MQIs received. At the end of Spring 2011 this was:

Tracker	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Total
<i>Munros</i>					
Total Count	216	156	140	87	599
% Complete	76%	55%	49%	31%	53%
<i>Furths</i>					
Total Count	1	3	25	6	35
% Complete	3%	9%	74%	18%	26%

Although we have 884 in total we only have 634 unique MQIs, the other 250 being repeats. Repeats are, of course, important but to meet our year 2014 target we need to complete a further 498 unique MQIs or around 170 each year. This is higher than we have achieved in any individual year so far. Hence the MQI Committee's current initiatives to increase the level of activity. The Tracker is published in the Newsletter and the Website so information on what still needs to be done is readily available.

Spring 2011 Observations

Some observations from the recently submitted Spring 2011 MQIs.

Mountain Bikes on Ben Macdui



While relaxing on the top of Ben Macdui in April I was dismayed to see four mountain bikers approaching the summit from the north. They had been laboriously pushing their bikes through snow and boulders, albeit in high spirits. They then set off in the direction of Sron Riach presumably en route for Linn of Dee. At Carn Etchachan I

met two other walkers who asked if I had seen them and commented that they had seen them cycling at a fast pace. Last year while on Ben Lomond I saw two other mountain bikers, complete with body armour, tackling the full descent of that mountain. One of them even managed a short cut over his handle bars. Derek Sime has also encountered mountain bikers on his hill days. Am I being selfish when I say I was dismayed? Why should I feel the mountains are exclusively for walkers and rock climbers? After all there is plenty of erosion caused by walkers and estates with their ATV's and new hill tracks. A quick look at the Access Code doesn't appear to exclude bikers as long as the act responsibly. Views would be welcomed for the next edition.

Bird Sightings



A scan of the 58 Spring MQIs received showed sightings of Ptarmigan on 18 hills, Golden Plover on 3, Snow Bunting on 3, Dotterel on 1, Ravens on 6. Eagles were seen on An Socach (Meall a'Chaisg), Stob Ghabhar and The Five Sisters. In addition there were sightings of a wide selection of smaller birds and wildfowl.

Helvellyn by Nethermost Cove

One Spring MQI I particularly enjoyed reading was Marion Jones's day on Helvellyn in early May. Marion and her husband had set off from Patterdale, followed Grisedale Beck and climbed the mountain via the largely pathless Nethermost Cove. As Marion explained this is not the "normal" route up and it gives a sense of isolation as you go through a SSSI noted for its flora. Marion and her husband certainly know their flora and fauna as the wide variety of species noted in the MQI demonstrates. As you will see from the Tracker we need more MQIs of the Furths.

Unconventional Descent

Anne Butler was on Liathach in early May when she was caught up in the effects of the major wild fire above Torrion village. She had seen smoke earlier in the walk but had put it down to muirburn. During her descent in Toll Ban fire had been visible moving upwards and east. She was suddenly approached by a HMCG helicopter and taken off the mountain at around 500 metres with 5 other walkers and her dog back to Torrion village. Helicopter water bombing was about to start and the party was under its flight path. Anne reports extensive damage to Liathach from road level to ridge with all vegetation burnt from Beinn Alligin carpark to Toll Ban corrie. I was up Beinn Dearg recently from that carpark and saw little evidence of damage so hopefully the vegetation is recovering quickly.

Choice of Route makes a Difference



A good example of choice of route making a difference was the contrasting MQIs submitted by myself and Derek Sime for Ben Alder and Bheinn Bheoil only one week apart. I have noticed in the past that our ratings of the same hills are similar. I tackled the two from Rannoch Lodge following the estate/forestry track to Loch Ericht with a bivouac near Ben Alder Cottage, ascent and walk out the

next day by the same route. Derek chose to traverse the mountains from Corrou Station to Dalwhinnie with an overnight camp at 570 meters below Ben Alder. Having previously climbed the two mountains from Culra Bothy I had held a long standing desire to walk in by my route and see Ben Alder Cottage – my choice to bivvy reflected my fear of ghosts! My MQI reflects disappointment with a rating of only 19 due to a lack of the wildness factor caused by the estate road and current constructions. The state of the cottage inside and around left much to be desired. Derek's ratings of 25 and 28 reflected the satisfaction of his linear route through remote country, a greater sense of wildness and the wide range of flora and fauna seen.

Getting Hooked on the MQI Bug

Derek Sime writes about his own experiences of completing MQIs.

As one of the original members of the Society, I first became involved in MQIs in the very early days of the project. I have to admit that my first reaction was that it sounded too much like work, especially "KPIs" (Key Performance Indicators), and the last thing I wanted to do when escaping to the hills at the weekend was to be reminded of the office deadlines – the very things from which I was escaping! However, curiosity got the better of me, and I resolved to have a go at one or two.

I also went along to the very first TMS meet, on an overcast and indifferent day in November 2003, with a good fall of fresh snow on the ground, and a thick mist on the tops. We met at Bridge of Orchy station and duly climbed to Beinn Dorain, afterwards convening in the Bridge of Orchy Hotel for a light refreshment and an attempt at a joint MQI, under the direction of John Burdin, the instigator of the project.

I subsequently became quite interested in the idea of recording the state of the hills, and soon got into the habit of doing an MQI every time I was on a Munro. In fact, it became an enjoyable task, rather than a chore, and the association with work was soon lost altogether. As I have now filed around 350 reports, I think I am beginning to get the hang of it. MQIs have also often been combined with other relevant and easy to do surveys, the most notable being the BTO's Project Ptarmigan a few years ago, and the current Bird Atlas Survey, both of which were very easy to do.

It definitely makes you more observant of your surroundings on the hill, and, through time, hopefully, a little more knowledgeable. To hear a bird calling in a wild landscape enhances the experience, but to recognise what it is that's making the sound is to add greatly to the degree of satisfaction, and enjoyment. It is also very satisfying to record your findings on a hill, knowing that in some small way, you are contributing to the historical record, and perhaps noting, and where appropriate, reporting any changes (e.g. access restrictions, inappropriate notices, new hill tracks, wind turbines etc.).

It is a rather sobering thought that our predecessors early in the last century may well have heard, on their hill outings, birds once common, but now very rare, or absent altogether in most areas, e.g. the corncrake (now very rarely found on the mainland). Could it be that in a few decades from now hillgoers will rarely hear a cuckoo or skylark?

There are various sources of information which I have used over the years to assist with identification of fauna and flora, and other features. A good all round starter for ten, as they say, is "Hostile Habitats", published by the SMC. This actually gives a host of information on mountain geology and landforms, human influences (old and new), and some basic information on birds, insects, mammals, amphibians, plants, mosses etc. If you are looking for more depth, I find the RSPB Handbook of Scottish Birds (obtainable from RSPB shops) very useful, and far better than those books which cover the birds of Britain and Europe (and often even larger areas). A CD of bird sounds is also useful, as so often you hear them but don't see them. The BTO has produced a particularly apt CD on the birds of Upland Britain, although this is not widely available.

For plants, it is a little more difficult. I believe there is a gap in the market here in that there is no single volume covering Scottish upland habitats (I would like to stand corrected on this statement), so instead it means trawling through larger volumes. Two, which I regularly consult, are the Collins Pocket Guide to Wild Flowers (McClintock & Fitter), and Scottish Wild Flowers (Michael Scott), but neither is ideal for the Scottish hills. Getting into more obscure publications there are some excellent photographs of many relevant plant species in "Hurringane" by Jim Baxter (albeit on Norway, but with many familiar plants), and "Our Alpine Flora", published by the Swiss Alpine Club – on Alpine plants, but again many of which can be found here. Other sources I use include leaflets and booklets from a variety of sources (Ben Nevis Wild Flowers, by JMT; An Easy Guide to Forest Trees, by the Forestry Commission; Moths & Butterflies of the Scottish Uplands, and Butterflies of the Highlands, both by Butterfly Conservation Scotland; Damselflies & Dragonflies of the Highlands, by the

Highland Council; and various publications by SNH. Some of these can be picked up at Tourist Information Offices.

However, no-one can be an expert in all eight MQI sections (and I am an expert in none of them), but as the Society receives more reports, and more people become involved, there is a better chance of getting a broad range of expertise.

I used to (try to) commit everything to memory and then write it up after returning home. However I came to realise that I was probably forgetting more than I remembered, so I decided to take very brief “shorthand” notes on a scrap of paper. For example, rather than writing out “cross leaved heath, in flower”, I simply note “XLH (F)”, and then translate in the typing up, and I have a mental note now of a whole range of such abbreviations, so the actual time taken to jot them down is minimal.

The important thing however is to enjoy completing the reports, as a complementary activity, adding to the value of your day on the hill.

Summer Targets for MQIs

The Tracker shows which mountains still require a summer MQI. All 127 are equally important in the long run but some of the Sections are nearly complete so it would be good to see them covered in green before the summer is out. Sections 5 (2 to complete), 6 (3), 8 (4), 12 (4), 13 (1), 14 (1) are all nearly complete. I intend to do A’Mhaighdean while on the Heightings trip to Ruadh Stac Mor so Section 14 is covered. Is there anyone willing to take on one or more of the others and do a Summer completion? Also how about a few Furths?

Next Edition

The intention is to issue the next edition following the “Summer MQI Season”, probably sometime late October. Please let me know what you think of this first attempt and, if you feel so inclined, offer your submissions for inclusion next time.

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